

# ARDEN

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## A Message from the Editor

The title of this journal, *Arden*, perhaps needs a bit of clarification for those who are unfamiliar with the reference. *Arden* was taken from the name of a forest in *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare. In this play, *Arden* serves as a locale in which all that seems to exist may or may not be real. It is a land in which creativity flourishes and love blooms. A home for the oppressed as well as for the virtuous laborers of nature, *Arden*, is considered to be a "green world." It is a place away from the strict rule and structures of society, where the imagination suspends reality, allowing disguises, trickery, and wit to enlighten and entertain the mind.

This journal, in its second year, began as an outlet for those among us who, whether through compulsion or habit, indulge in creative writing. This issue continues last year's exploration of form and style, incorporating many themes from the heart, mind, and spirit. Upon these pages, poems and stories spring to life, sharing the deepest thoughts of the authors who created them.

In this issue, we are honored to include the works of Dr. Heberto Padilla, a poet, translator, and esteemed professor. Dr. Padilla received a Ph. D. from the University of Havana. After publishing his book *Fuera Del Juego*, he was jailed for critiquing the Castro-ran government. He left Cuba in 1980, moving to America and gaining professorships at such institutions as Princeton and New York University. In 1990, Dr. Padilla published a memoir entitled *Self-Portrait of the Other*.

I would personally wish to acknowledge the faculty and staff of the Language and Literature Department for their continuing support and guidance. Also, I wish to thank Ms. Cheryl Gaston for advice and guidance in making *Arden* possible.

John Kocian

Advisor – Cheryl Gaston

Editor – John Kocian

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## Entre el gato y la casa

1

Entre el gato y la casa  
hay un plano inclinado lleno de gentes,  
con pinta de arlequines,  
que se quieren mover en un campo de acción  
muy lejos de mi alcance;  
además, como ya no hace sol,  
se desdibujan y enredan  
en las ramas del arce.  
Se han pasado todo el otoño ahí,  
apoyados algunos en la cerca de piedra,  
otros en la cumbrera del garaje,  
alertas como gallos.  
Yo permanezco inmóvil.  
Yo llamo a éstos los actores  
extrapolados de mis escenarios  
o, si prefieren oír, de mis ficciones.

2

Escribo en Princeton  
desde una casa en Markam Road.  
El gato que menciono es un siamés  
que cada día sube la escalera  
de la puerta del patio; husmea y come,  
pero no entra jamás.  
Cuando hace mucho frío se cobija  
en las yerbas más altas,  
esperando que se abra la puerta.

3

Entre el gato y la puerta  
Entre el abrigo y la orfandad  
Entre los ojos de un animal cualquiera  
Entre los sueños y la desesperanza  
Entre un idioma y otro  
Entre un país perdido y otro que no aparece  
Yo permanezco inmóvil, al acecho.  
Después abro los ojos  
Y afuera lo que veo  
son los ojos del gato.

## Between the cat and my house

1

Between the cat and my house  
there is a diagonal plane full of people  
painted as harlequins  
who want to move in a field of action  
well out of my reach;  
besides, since there is no longer any sun,  
they become blurred and tangled  
in the branches of the maple tree.  
They have spent all autumn there,  
some leaning on the stone wall,  
others on top of the garage,  
like roosters on the watch.  
I stay still.  
I see them as actors  
projected from my inner stage  
or, if you prefer, out of my fictions.

2

I write in Princeton,  
in a house on Markham Road.  
The cat I have mentioned is Siamese;  
every day it comes up the steps  
from the yard to the door,  
it sniffs and nibbles  
but never enters the house.  
When the cold comes, it finds shelter  
in the high brush,  
waiting for the door to open.

3

Between the cat and the door  
Between shelter and abandonment  
Between the eyes of any animal  
Between dreams and despair  
Between one language and another  
Between one lost country and another still to appear  
I stay still, waiting.  
Then I open my eyes and what I see outside  
are the eyes of the cat.

## En Verano

En verano  
el sol entra por las puertas abiertas  
el flamboyán mugriento  
sin color  
corre a mis manos  
y yo le tiño el verde  
el arrebol  
y lo circundo del mejor diseño  
Es cuando a plena luz  
se aparecen mis múltiples antepasados  
que vienen a instalarse en torno a mí  
como reproducciones hechas del natural  
Son los que velan mi sueño en la cama de roble  
los que tienen la sencilla costumbre  
de despertarme a la primera luz del alba  
los que funden las turbinas hostiles  
los que logran mantenernos de pie  
los partidarios de poesía

*Trans. Leslie Maxwell*

## In Summer

In summer  
the sun enters through open doors  
the gritty flamboyán tree  
yet without color  
runs to my hands  
and I give it green  
and red  
and prune it to its best shape  
Then, in the plain light of day  
those who have come before  
appear around me and stand  
like reproductions made of life  
Ones who watch me dream in the oak bed  
and have the simple custom  
of waking me with the dawn  
the ones who halt the hostile turbines  
and manage to keep us standing  
the eternal patrons of poetry



la seducción de madre tierra

luz pálida  
tranquilidad  
de gloria mística  
exalación antigua  
de globo distante

aliento cariñoso  
acariciando  
el superficie de  
una charca  
plata

Taxco

(This is what home feels like)

White washed buildings  
with red tiled roofs  
clinging precariously  
to the mountain;

cobblestone streets  
too narrow to admit progress;  
huddled families  
airing their laundry  
to the harsh judgement  
of the Sun----

moss, mold and  
flowered foliage  
vying  
for a chance to grow  
among the cracks in  
the alabaster

and somewhere inside  
the bell is tolling.

## THE CARDINAL

The knocks came on my third story window.  
Fifteen knocks in succession.  
The flashy red cardinal still seems determined  
to come inside  
although the window is closed and locked.  
Does he see his own reflection  
thinking that he is another bird?  
Does he see the image of the tree  
in which he sits perched and decides  
to move over to the closer branch?  
Does he see my silhouette shadow  
looming in the background?  
Can he detect any movement  
behind the glass as I creep forward?  
Apparently not – for he crashes  
against the windowpane  
and falls onto the ledge.  
Dazed solely for a second  
he shakes his head and spreads his wings.  
Circling back a few yards,  
he strikes the hard, clear surface again.  
Again he falls onto the ledge  
where he rests and ponders the situation.  
Looking at the window with bright blank eyes.  
Can he see past the images reflected on  
the outer side of my window?  
Can he see me?



## la seducción

mexico city. . .  
an ocean of lights  
sprawling across the land  
up hillsides  
like the lapping tide  
caressing the mountains  
erasing them softly

mexico city. . .  
rising from the warm mud  
of tenochtitlan  
a swarming evidence of man  
of a people  
born out of violence  
into mestizoneess

mexico city. . .  
calling me like a friend  
seducing me  
with the splendor  
of garibaldi nights  
and sweet strong smells  
in the streets

la ciudad de méxico. . .  
subtle ritmo de vida  
beckoning me,  
ven, ven amiga, güerita  
succumb to the mestizo,  
to the insistent ritmo  
and lose yourself  
in el laberinto

to be a woman . . .

to open the box of fate  
and taste the forbidden fruit  
to be the mother of the world  
yet cower before the first stone

to suffer the sting of violation  
and survive, carrying beauty inside,  
giving birth to an impetus,  
a face to change the world

to be trapped inside a tower,  
a Lady without a name  
or be confined, hysterical,  
in a room with yellow wallpaper

to be the angel in the house  
or the fallen and stricken coquette  
to be the madwoman in the attic  
and never have a room of one's own

to share in this inheritance,  
but to be vindicated,  
hewing a new identity out of custom,  
escaping the tower  
and freeing the creeping woman  
who has the world,  
and all its thousand faces,  
floating inside her womb . . .

to be a man . . .

to slay monster, mother, and myth,  
to be a monke or a rake,  
to drown for a Hero's love  
or sail a thousand ships,

to kill one's father's brother. . . or not,  
or plant seeds of poisoned fruit,  
forever wear an albatross,  
and follow falling stars,

to speak Greek, emotionlessly,  
to prefer not to,  
a stranger to oneself,  
deaf to a mermaid's song,

projecting filaments into air,  
charting one's own stars,  
dying pro patria dulce,  
during a strange meeting,

starve, hysterical, naked,  
be a happy genius,  
feel first; in Spring,  
with a thousand faces.

Up and Down as One

Om Mane Padme Hum  
Buddha still does  
inverted zazen  
standing mindfully  
lotus ripples  
know suffering  
thoughts without self  
zen garden  
sand falling  
over blossoms  
Dharma wheels spinning  
saffron robe sole possessions  
and wooden alms  
zafu cushion  
standing on head  
plowing and sitting  
saluting sunshine  
A wise, old monk  
ascends.

## downtown Zen

Awkward offset ticktock-ticktick  
 of a rusted thrift clock  
 blending background noise  
 in earthtoned flat  
 windows, hazed by delusion  
 pyramid of old take out,  
 Chinese, Italian, Thai,  
 a WW 2 destruction zone  
 of sustenance,  
 I sit in silent suffocation,  
 an everyday zazen routine,  
 the monotonous banter,  
 pasty Brooks Brother's suit corpse,  
 retelling with smug grin,  
 (and ancient mariner hindsight)  
 the fall  
 of our great civil(ization),  
 complete with its own albatross.  
 Leader (that term with a certain presidential looseness)  
 of the free-if you have the money-world  
 speaks to me, teaches me his dharmas,  
 confirming my schizobigbrotherparanoia.  
 Dollar, almighty, god bless it,  
 dangling around the throats and minds and hearts  
 weighs heavy like cheap boxed wine  
 redamericanwhite & blue,  
 heavier than the 38th street prophet  
 in faded bluegray sweater  
 dress uniform of the ghetto solider,  
 saluting reverently  
 commander-in-chief jonnie walker  
 preacher to can-lit corrugated  
 constellations,  
 an aimless pilgrimage poetic  
 waxing philosophic  
 of mad brown bag food scrap zen  
 having/not having  
 being nothing when nothing is being  
 speaking to the sky  
 a pauper consciousness  
 where the barrel burns warm  
 and downtown is still deaf and dumb.

## ON THE ANSWERING MACHINE

I felt you in the rain today.  
You rolled across my skin.  
I started to brush you off my forehead, but let you run.  
Over my cheek, down my neck, between my breasts--  
Like your fingertips used to.  
And another globe of you slipped past my collar and down my back.  
I licked you off the back of my hand. I wondered if you could feel it.

## ADORNMENT

In the morning, she slips into her rings.  
Her hands hang like a forehead crowned,  
And she returns the beguiling metal to its velvet house.

She is tired of being heavy with adoration.



## The Garden

I remember the sweat rolling down my face,  
And the salty aftertaste it left in my mouth;  
I recall the sun's intense rays  
Beaming down from the heavens,  
As I tried to dig the earth  
With a fire burning in my eyes.  
My raw hands cried out for mercy,  
And my back was about to give.  
At the time, I could have cared less -  
About hoeing rows, planting seeds,  
And babysitting the ground for no apparent reason.

Now, I would give almost anything to go back  
And put my heart and soul into that garden.  
How I wish I could have reaped its rewards,  
Not just the food, but all the beauty it brought  
To my small back yard -  
And the treasures that were staring me in the face,  
Which I was too blind to see.

## Pegasus and Orion

A shower of light drizzled through the trees,  
Spying on us in the shade.  
Your perfume and the flowers drove me wild,  
As your lips slowly pressed to mine.

I could taste love and passion,  
Lingering, on the tip of your tongue.  
Your soft, delicate skin longed to be touched,  
And our hearts began to race.

The fire in your eyes raged out of control.  
Gently we caressed in ecstasy,  
Until the moon and stars lit up the night sky.  
Together, we watched Pegasus and Orion.

That day, I learned all about love.  
I learned, that two can become one.

## Battle in the Sky

The sky breaks down into tears;  
The earth shares its sadness;  
The sun, hidden behind such sorrow,  
Can only sit and wait.

The clouds, concerned with other things,  
Accidentally give way to the sun.  
A billion universes fall,  
Each containing trillions of stars.

The light is bent in every direction,  
In most cases ripped to pieces.  
At the end of all this chaos,  
Light is collected in a pot -

Shimmering like gold,  
The reminder of promise.

## Just Another Star?

A faint glow in the night sky,

So far away, yet seemingly  
Tangible. Burning with desire,  
To be seen.

Desperately seeking  
Acknowledgment, to find  
It's place in the infinite

void.

One of trillions.

Lost in the crowd.

Seemingly similar,  
but different.

## THE SHRIKE

(*Lanius ludovicianus*)

So much of summer then seemed blue sky threaded  
 with those strands of clouds we called horses' tails,  
 each day a carriage pulled by plodding steed,  
 for days passed slowly then, the sky pinned in place  
 like a quilt clamped in our grandma's quilting frame,  
 thousands of tiny pin pricks later the quilt removed  
 for another, differently-colored log-cabin design.  
 Lacerated by splintered oyster shell roads,  
 our bare feet pricked their way to summer's end  
 when even briars could not penetrate those hardened soles.

Sometimes against that static sky we'd see a shape  
 hung high on a spiny tip of the barbed wire fence  
 its glaring eyes staring up, away from our astonished faces--  
 a stiff lizard, its throat impaled, viscera dried,  
 or the head of a grasshopper, the large yellow kind  
 with streaks of red and the wingspan of a sparrow.  
 But everything was large then, even the absent butcher  
 whose prey seemed some dark joke beyond our understanding.  
 Years later Peterson's Field Guide reduced that taloned shadow  
 to less than robin size, its black mask only reminder of our fear.

## Millennium Spring

Now in this mythless century the wind  
 that caresses her cheek is no Zephyr,  
 The "H" on the weather map no abbreviation  
 for Hyperion or Helios or even Egyptian Horus.  
 The sun that warms her cheek as she lies,  
 arms stretched out, in the ropy hammock  
 is not drawn by the four horses hastening  
 to feed upon herbs in the Blessed Isles.  
 The basil and thyme, the blooms of daffodils,  
 the iris leaves now sprouting from the soil  
 she has weeded and mulched with compost  
 scent her fingers with their crushed green life.  
 Above her the red maple's flowering spikes  
 silhouetted against the cloudless sky recall  
 the plumage of a flock of exotic birds  
 roosting, songless, strangely silent.

She is no Leda embraced in swanny feathers,  
 she is no Danae showered in godly gold;  
 she is just a gardener dreaming  
 the fruits of her own labor.

## SUCH A ROCKY PLACE

*For John Von Blon (1953-1995)*

*"his mind bloomed like a thorny thistle on a cliff's edge. . . ." The Odyssey, Book Nine*

"A member of the Wild Bleeding Heart family, it blooms from May clear to September, holding fast through winter, returning with spring. The plant is called the Pale Pink Corydalis, though if you name it from the heart, you can call it what you want. For it blooms in the most astounding places. Not just in the granite, you see. . . but for all who have known it and glimpsed its meanings, in the heart as well." Douglas Wood, "Heart-Flower," *The Boundary Waters Journal*, Spring 1991

### **I. On the Kawishiwi River (August, 1991)**

We spread our jackets on a rocky outcrop underneath a twisted fir  
dried needles everywhere, the sound of Kawishiwi River rapids,  
a chipmunk eyeing our lunch of string cheese, dried fruit.  
There in the sun, our hearts flooded with secrets we couldn't share,  
a flower grew where years of wind had filled the cracks  
with balsam needles, chipmunk fur, chance crumbs, wind-blown sand.  
We identified it later, pale pink corydalis, but then we just exclaimed  
to see its pink and yellow daintiness here in such a rocky place,  
here on bedrock, glacier-gnawed bones of the earth.  
We stepped carefully, awed by beauty's survival, looking  
not at one another but at those flowers dancing in the wind.

### **II. At the St. Louis River (July, 1987)**

A tornado tore through town that night, dropping trees on cars.  
We left without raincoats, gray sky reflecting  
gathering emotional clouds none of us could understand.  
Stopping at Jay Cooke, we slid the muddy trails along the river,  
losing you in the woods where you watched from its leafy fringes,  
distancing yourself from our laughter.  
Later on the swinging bridge we stood not touching, facing east,  
watching raindrops dimple the surface of the river  
like thousands of invisible water striders.  
The river wound its way through resistant slate slick black with rain,  
its ancient rocky memory of muddy effluvia metamorphosed into mica.

### **III. At Fifty Lakes (January 1987)**

Past the barn, past the beaver lodge, past the muskrat houses  
the waxing moon beckoned us along a path less accessible in summer.  
Orion wandered across the sky, followed by faithful Sirius.  
We marvelled at the clarity, the dome of this midnight sky  
clearer than a planetarium projection. We wandered that week  
through tamarack and tag alder, drinking wine and lighting fires,  
you taking off without a word for hours, then reappearing,  
eyes squinting in the sun, hawking and spitting in the snow.  
You were reading Homer's *Odyssey* that winter, the book opening up  
like a Ouija board, and my eye seeing but not understanding  
the buxom snowwoman we fashioned, standing stiff and staring  
between you and the man you loved.

## IV. On Park Point, Duluth (August 1994)

We were prepared for more than weakness,  
for open sores and wild mood swings beyond your typical display,  
but even in this debilitating illness you dodged our questioning eyes  
as if you carried the whole Northwoods for camouflage.  
We packed for a picnic, crossing the lift bridge for sandy beaches  
where you stretched out in the shade of a wooded sand dune,  
your face, taut and bony as an old man's, nestled in one arm.  
I walked to the water's edge, looking toward Duluth, its buildings  
perched like cliff-dwelling birds in the basaltic rocks of ancient lava flows,  
its harbor protected by this baymouth bar formed by gentler river forces:  
This is the landscape we traverse, the ambiguous geology of the heart.



1.

Water drops  
puddles onto ground;  
girl's hair

2.

Day turning to night  
green streaks against navy sky  
fireflies dancing

3.

White dancers-  
Gentle breeze blows  
Dogwood blossoms

4.

Tear drops  
Girl's sunburnt cheeks  
white trails

5.

Wedding dance-  
Mirrors floating through air  
Children's bubbles



## Starry-Eyed: The Realm of the Ideal Poem

After the reading,  
the silent, young student,  
lovely as a poem,  
eyes bright as stars,  
smiled, rushed up,  
touched her necklace and said:

"I want to write a poem  
that doesn't have the  
forced  
emphasis  
star-struck poets  
with infinite *I's*  
give  
certain  
words  
(and silences)  
when they  
read their frigid poems.

I want to write a poem  
that doesn't turn into frosted glass  
(like stars caught in crystal webs),  
or stop at the end of lines,  
or pause at odd  
places,  
but clearly goes on to infinity.

I want to write a poem  
with no bullshit,  
no star-crossed lovers,  
weeping images,  
pretty points of light,  
eternally galloping rhythms,  
or deformed, cold feet,

I want to write a poem  
with each perfect word  
a glittering gem,  
strung together,  
an unbreakable necklace.

I want to write a poem  
that soars silently on the winds,  
walks the clouds,  
rides the stars."

I smiled politely  
and eyed  
the endless necklaces of stars  
of the cold, clear night  
in perfect silence.

## Fragment and Splice: The English Teacher's Lament (with apologies to Robert Frost)

Some say the theme will end in fragments,  
Some say a splice.  
From what I've seen of freshman sense  
I hold with those who say fragments.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know of essays late  
To say that for nonsense the splice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

## Mobile in Space

mobile in space  
C-shaped  
Cheshire cat grin  
of the moon  
a monthly vanishing act  
a falling half-eaten pie  
on black oilcloth  
it only moves  
when you aren't  
looking

Y

As she raced across the open field of dewy turf, the sun warmed away the mist in gentle evaporation.

M e l i s s a.

A distant voice called from behind her.

She paused, looking back. Then with a giggle, she leapt forward like a giddy fawn. The sun, charting its timeless course across the sky, lapped away the last of the lazy water resting on tiny blades of blue grass. Clover blossoms brushed against her bare ankles as her thigh high sun dress wafted around her. Wild flowers sprung up before her like time lapse photos, bursting into bloom. Bounding into the shin deep pool of bright color, the petals broke free and flew away as butterflies.

M e l i s s a.

The sun echoed from overhead.

She dashed into the cool shelter of the towering trees. Invisible birds praised ancient spirits from high above in the leafy crown. Squirrels scampered up trunks, as her souls padded along the moist path. She hadn't climbed a tree since she was a child. Squatting down, she pushed off with her powerful legs, launching herself toward an overhead limb. Taking hold, she swung her lower body toward the trunk, scaling it with her bare feet. She threw her thigh over the branch and sat upright. The forest was a thick wall of vegetation on all sides. She flipped herself upside down, dangling like a possum and laughing at her inverted view of the world. Crossing her ankles freed her arms. Swaying like a trapeze artist, her dress doubled over on itself exposing her naked body. Her blonde hair swished like gold seaweed reflecting sunlight off rippling waves.

M e l i s s a.

The wind whispered from the west.

She righted herself and dropped to the ground, her feet sinking into warm beach sand that rolled in gentle dunes around her. The sun sat in the heavy afternoon sky while puffy clouds slid along above her. Forming and reforming, they shifted in an endless array of elegant art. She sat on the sun-heated surface and wiggled her toes

through the tiny grains of silicon. Swirling them in slow circles, she dug two tiny depressions. She slid her feet back and forth, extending and retracting her long lower limbs until they formed two matching channels beneath them. Stretching her legs into the canals, she covered them with the overturned sand. She buried them under the heavy pile until the weight made them immobile. The sun warmed her exposed skin while her legs lay embalmed in the cool, damp mound.

M e l i s s a.

Droned the dunes in the distance.

She ripped herself free, as the beach stretched into a plateau. She raced across the compact ground to the edge. Leaping from the cliff, she spread her arms like the wings of a bird, her legs magnificently trailing behind her. Her hands parted the water as she plunged headfirst into the lucid lake. She emerged to find a mountain range ringing the horizon in jagged hues of white, purple, and blue. The still water reflected the brilliant pattern of astral bodies sprinkled across the black sky. She pumped her legs like a whale fin, propelling herself forward. Turning on her back, she floated like a lily. Her hair spread out around her in mermaid fashion, gently swishing back and forth in a silky, gold crown.

Melissa.

The old woman ran her fingers through her daughter's brittle hair. It was dry and dull like withered cornhusks. The coma was taking its toll. She tried not to look at the severed legs that abruptly ended mid-thigh.

"Why won't she wake up?"

The doctor looked up from his chart.

"Why won't she wake up?" the old woman muttered absently. "I'm sure she hears me." She did her best to frame the once beautiful face with now limp curls. "I talk to her everyday." The old woman sat up, turning to face him. "Why won't she wake up?"

He closed his chart.

"Frankly, we don't know Mrs. Washington." After taking a deep breath, he let the air go. "We don't know."



## A Parody as Paradigm: Matches, the Last Ones

In its usual position on the southern corner of the large desk lies the matchfolder. What is its history? Seven consecutive matches in the back row still remain. Each is 5 mm. long, red, with holes like sponge, 30 mm. tall, and 3 mm. wide. Originally, the matchfolder held twenty in two rows of ten. The package is standard size, 50 x 39 x 8 (top) mm. and a weight of 2.47 grams. Each match torn out weighs 0.10 grams. Each has a precision that creates movement.

How is the matchfolder characterized? The cardboard cover is new, smooth, shiny, and practically unbent. The striking surface, a 50 x 5 mm. strip on the front cover, is dull brown and not extremely rough. Small glittering particles are embedded in the strip and glued in place. A tiny white border runs directly above the strip while a staple fastening the matchfolder bottom is in line with the lower edge of the striking surface.

The background color of the cover is flat black. On the front cover are nine white capital *H*'s encircled by Chinese red rings 8 mm. in diameter. What does it foreshadow? In small, white, black letters printed below the striking surface are the words: CLOSE COVER BEFORE STRIKING. Below this warning is a glossy, dark brown blot--perhaps, in some points of view, melted paraffin or shoe polish--which runs along the bottom fold, leaving visible only the letters: ATCH CO. S. Filling nearly the entire reverse cover is one large circled *H* of the same design.

The inside cover is white, devoid of letters or insignia. No symbols where none intended.

What is the setting? The desk on which the matchfolder lies is made of sturdy, light tan wood. Two feet by the desk's southern corner stands a small bed draped with an unmade, thin, black spread riddled with large tears. A large picture window near the headboard admits bright, warm sunlight. Shafts of yellow heat the brown-tiled floor and the desk. A lamp is on. The 100-watt bulb burns out. Murphy's Law. Exposition ends.

The matchfolder is picked up. The innermost match is yanked out and struck on the friction strip with a rising action while the cover is open. As it ignites, the match emits a *ppffffsssss* sound which increases sharply in volume, then gradually diminishes. Simultaneously, a zigzag halo of smoke is flung up into the air.

No mean pyrotechnical display.

A second later there is only the quiet sizzle of burning. The pungent smoke ring expands, drifts apart, and disappears mysteriously. The inner flame is dark yellow-orange on top and blue on the bottom. A lighter, thinner layer of flame surrounds the darker parts: pinkish-orange on top, pale blue on the bottom.

It fizzes a good while.

The match is used, blown out, and tossed into an ashtray shaped like a hollow cylinder on the desk. The matchfolder is returned to the desk's southern corner.

A noise: *ping*. This is not how it is.

Hours pass. No suspense here.

A book is placed shut on the desk. A history of reading. The French new novel. Through the window filters the feeble twilight.

Bright ribbons of sunlight steaming onto the warm desk. The folder is opened. The match next to the last used is pulled out and struck on the friction strip. As before, the match burns for a few seconds, is blown out, tossed into the cylindrical ashtray, and the matchfolder is returned to its place.

Hours pass. Another book. *Waiting for Godot*. Nothing happens . . . twice. Twilight.

The fifth match is used. Sequence of events as before. An old story, retold. Theater of the absurd. Again, the fifth match torn out is adjacent to where the sixth was.

It's a good fizzle. Pyromaniacal.

Four is the unnamable.

Three. According to pattern. Lessness. Before it is blown out, however, blood mixed with mucus is coughed up on the match. The match is dropped on the floor, picked up, and quickly extinguished by rapid to-and-fro rockaby movements. Sequence of events as before, except no book is read. Acts without words. And there is a full moon.

Stars have shifted positions. Full moon again.

Dust coats the desk and the matchfolder lying in place, undisturbed. The thick layer of dust is wiped off the desk and the matchfolder. Two is torn out according to ritual and used. Imagination dead. Imagine.

One by one, the matches have been removed consecutively from right to left, like events sequenced in stories. Stories and texts for nothing. For no one.

This means everything and it means nothing.

The last one. This match stands at the edge of the back row. Endgame. Its back to back it. Next and last to be used up.

The last match is torn out. A climax. It quivers while thrusting away from the desk. A falling action onto the bed. The instant the lit match touches the gasoline-soaked bedspread, the bed ignites. Amid the leaping flames the body on the bed remains motionless.

Quick footsteps. A door slams.

The flames spring from the bed and engulf the desk with a roar. Red-orange tongues of the flames reach up wildly from the lower, murky yellow areas. Layers of dense black smoke roll upon themselves, clouding the picture window. Soon the whole room is ablaze, filled with the deep crackling of flames. Denouement.

A charred corpse still on the bed.



## Holiday

"Now you ladies shush now. Just shush. Here she comes. Good morning Miss Catherine. How are you feeling this fine day?"

"I'm quite well today Josephine, quite well."

"Would you like your regular wash and set?"

"Of course Josephine, just like always."

"Good morning ladies." Catherine Franklin enters the lagoon of sets, perms, and coloring. Smiling faces greet her with a unanimous "good morning" in return.

"Why Miss Patty Shoemaker I don't believe I've ever seen you here this early on a Saturday morning." Miss Catherine says as she takes the seat next to the young lady.

"I've heard this is the best time to come, so I thought I would give it a try." Patty covers her mouth to hide a little giggle that spills out.

Gently touching Patty's shoulder Catherine says, "I think so, I always enjoy my chats in the early morning. Having my hair done with a little coffee and talk always sets my Saturday off right. It must be a joy for you Madeline, to bring your eldest to the parlor?"

"It is indeed, Miss Catherine." Madeline Shoemaker responds.

"Having your hair done for Sunday church Miss Catherine?" Florence Simons asks sitting across from Catherine in the pool of ladies.

"Why no Florence. Actually I shall miss Sunday services tomorrow, and if the weather is fine, I may well miss next Sunday too. I'm going on holiday."

"You are?" Some one questions and the ladies smile.

"Mr. Franklin and I shall set sail for the Caribbean this afternoon, after my parlor visit."

"Just as carefree as can be, aren't you Miss Catherine?" Abigail Warren says.

"Mr. Franklin has worked very hard and deserves a holiday. Harold always wanted to travel, so we're off today to the Caribbean. Of course, I first must have my hair done and then there is some shopping to do. There are things you must have for a cruise you know."

"And what do you plan to do in the Caribbean Miss Catherine?" Winifred Marshall questions.

"We begin our adventure by flying down to Miami. Our departure is scheduled for sunset, but Harold and I want to arrive early so we can get a good look at the ship. On the dock we stand there hand in hand admiring the glorious ship. I'm astonished of its immense size. It's blue and white and as large as a city. I've heard they are like floating cities, adorned to meet your every conceivable want or need. Its elegance leaves me speechless. It sits upon the water like a swan, motionless with perfect posture. Sparkles of light dance on its blue hull while the white bow towers over untouched. I realize then that the

water offers only a small hint of the splendor we are about to embark on. As we board, the sunset's golden hue engulfs the giant, reminding us that the ship is but a minnow in the universe of seas."

Hesitantly, Joan interrupts, "Miss Catherine. I'm ready for your wash now." Catherine rises, leaving silence in her wake. Minutes tick away with only the cascade of the sprayer breaking the rudderless silence.

"Come sit in the chair Miss Catherine. I'm ready for you." Josephine says as Joan removes the towel from Catherine's hair.

"What happens after that Miss Catherine? What happens when you board the ship?" Patty asks, before a wave of questions pour from the others.

"Our ship's captain greets us as we board. We return his pleasantries and his personal porter escorts us to our cabin. The captain is kind enough to offer his guest quarters to us and sends word by his porter that tonight we shall dine at the captain's table."

"We quickly unpack, shower and dress for dinner. I wear the black gown Harold insisted I buy and he of course wears his black coat and tie. He is so handsome, looking at him, I wish I could see him wear it more often."

"We are seated at the captain's table promptly at seven. We are introduced to dozens of distinguished guests. There are so many names of individuals, companies and governmental departments that I am overwhelmed and cannot remember any of them. The beautifully set table and the majesty of the dining room spellbind our attention. Waiters surround our table. I need only lift my hand and one plate disappears and another promptly replaces it. Our taste buds are delightfully entertained on shrimp, swordfish, and fresh green salad. My wine, water and coffee are never half empty."

"Harold and I listen to the charming music being performed across the room. Of course Harold instinctively knows that I want to dance. He takes my hand and leads me to the dance floor. We drown ourselves in the music, dancing cheek against cheek well past midnight. Whispering in my ear, Harold suggests a moonlit stroll around the deck. As we walk Harold mentions the little house on Elm Street that I've always loved, but in the wonderment of the evening we leave it behind us. We kiss under the moon and retire to our cabin."

To break the silence Abigail Warren says, "Your holiday sounds very romantic Miss Catherine."

"It is Abigail. It is. But it's so much more." Catherine answers emerging from the oblivious waters and then continues.

"I open my eyes to a soft light filtering through the window. As I rise I pull the silken sheets from me and search for Harold's face. He has already poured his coffee and is hidden behind the *New York Times*. To meet our



needs they deliver the *Times*, *Miami Herald* and the *Atlanta Constitution* with our gourmet omelet, toast, juice, fruit, and coffee. Our breakfast is privately served in our cabin so we may enjoy it alone and at our leisure. I am delighted with the fresh cut flowers and thank Harold for his kind gesture toward me, but he gives credit to the captain.

"While I am showering and dressing for the day the captain's porter returns to take the breakfast tray. He asks if we are in need of anything. Upon receiving a satisfactory answer, he extends the captain's invitation of a personal tour of the ship. Harold of course, respectfully accepts.

"The captain spends hours showing us the masterfully designed ship. Every intricate detail is adequately described. Of course, Harold is fascinated with its commerce. I urge him to forget business for just a few short days and he promises he will. We thank the captain for his kindness and together Harold and I set off to enjoy some of the activities the captain has so generously presented to us."

"I chat with the ladies over a delicate mixed cocktail while Harold joins the men at a game of roulette. The talk is enjoyable but quickly grows to a bore with my anticipation of the pool, sunny patio and tennis on the courts. Harold and I excuse ourselves and retreat to our room to change into our suits for a swim. The cool inviting water raises our spirits and we splash and laugh with the others we share the water with. We sun in deck chairs with our eyes closed listening to the fading laughter in our red darkness. At dinner the captain announces our arrival in the Caribbean Islands and promises an early dock. I find it hard to sleep for anticipating our adventure on the island."

"It's time for the dryer now Miss Catherine."

"But I have to leave soon and I want to hear the rest." Winifred Marshall inserts.

"Oh Josephine, it can air dry today. Let it be."

Catherine returns to the reservoir of ladies.

"While we sleep the ship docks and all is prepared for our departure to the island. Harold and I barely touch our breakfast we are so excited about our day of exploration. 'Who would have ever wondered that this little island held so much,' I say to Harold. We visit quaint little shops that adorn both sides of the main street. Harold is splendidly patient as I search for a new hat. With his assistance, I find a perfect accessory to my new yellow dress and white shoes. Donning my newest purchase, we set out to explore. We rent bicycles and ride in the green plush hills and visit ruins from wars past. We take a guided tour of the interior and its splendid production of bananas, mangos and pineapple. We taste the succulent fruits and wash the sweetness from our lips."

"We stroll the beach hand in hand, holding our shoes. We find an umbrella seat and order drinks from the beach restaurant. We sit and watch the children marvel at the water, sun, sand and waves. The young are so joyful to watch. Harold is always delighted to see new discoveries unveil in a young person's face. We sit for hours, a minute or for eternity, I'm not really sure. We watch the waves break. The tide comes in and then washes back out again. We cool our feet in the deep blue waters. The coolness against our skin tingles and tries to urge us in. We fight the temptation and return to the shadow of our umbrella and to our melting ice drinks that are growing bland."

Josephine touches Catherine's hair in the rollers. "It's time to comb it out Miss Catherine."

Catherine changes her seat once again as Florence Simons asks, "Will you eat on the ship that night Miss Catherine?"

"Oh no, we will eat on the island. Harold has a knack for finding the perfect restaurant. He finds a quaint little place on the beach. We can hear the call of the soothing waves in the exposed night and soft violin music reply within. The musician comes to our table and plays a romantic tune while Harold takes my hand in his. I shudder at the unexpected touch but welcome it with a smile. The dinner is light and enjoyable but the ship beckons us back with three blasts of its horn. We leisurely walk back to the ship in silence, reminiscing on our day. We peacefully sleep while the ship breaks dock and transports us to another island and another world. Tomorrow we will wake to the soft sun of another dream filled day."

"You're all done now Miss Catherine."

"Thank you Josephine. Thank you. You have done a marvelous job as usual."

"Good bye Miss Catherine, we hope you enjoy your trip. Drop us a post card." The ladies say as Catherine hands Josephine her pay.

"I will be sure to ladies."

Catherine takes a deep breath, taking in the Atlanta air as the parlor door shuts behind her. She begins her trudge down Courtland Street, passing the jewelers and the dress shop, never looking in. She passes Edgewood, Auburn and Ellis streets without noticing that each block grows more dark, dingy and worn. At the corner she mechanically turns right on Center Boulevard. The ship's horn blast washes from her ear as she reaches her apartment building. She notices the outside door with its broken hinge and the broken promise of its repair. She enters the building and quietly ascends the three flights. She turns right and places the worn key in its rightful place. The door opens and closes to silence. Without a word she goes to Harold. She holds up the black and white photograph then sits it carefully back in its forty-year-old resting-place. In silence, she goes to the kitchen and takes her medication.



## The Tailgate

-- Here he comes. Walking up like he always does, like he owns the world. He always acts like it's no big deal, that owning the world stuff. He walks with his feet spread wide, with his head slightly lowered, like he's saying 'you can't move me -- just come and try.' That's just how he is . . . he always comes up and ignores me for a minute, then comes to give me one of those hugs. So predictable -- here he comes now . . .

-- Hey girl.

-- Hey, how are you?

-- I'm okay.

-- He always says that. He's always okay. I guess that's part of owning the world. You never say 'it's been a hard day,' at least, not out loud. But still, he gives me those hugs that say 'I need something.' I wish I knew what. It always seems to get lost . . .

I remember that song, that song that says, 'I wanna take you for granted' -- I remember us both singing those words, and when our eyes met, he said, 'isn't it ironic' and I knew what he meant, then. But whatever it was got lost in the music and I forgot.

-- Hey, why don't y'all play?

-- Seems like we could find something else to do at these little get-togethers, but I guess there isn't much else in a small town that's better than this. I like to watch them anyway . . . the way his head bends over the guitar, the way his fingers touch the strings, the way the music seems to come from his soul. That's just sentimentalizing the whole business, though. It's really not much more than some good ol' redneck boys sitting around playing guitars far from the sophisticated life of the city . . . But is life so simple, when everything seems to come down to music and song lyrics and things equally indecipherable between us. .

I remember him telling me of his passion for the music -- of how he had written songs. I asked him if he ever played them -- 'no' he said, 'I burned them.' How typical. There's a poet hiding in there -- I'm sure -- not a Pope or a Milton, but a poet -- an earthy, solid poet -- like a Heaney, perhaps. And then again, maybe I just read too much. Maybe he doesn't know he's a poet, or maybe it doesn't fit the frame -- lurking poetry and eloquence under the good ol' boy facade. Just like that time he wore a wallet-chain to a wedding -- 'I got a reputation to maintain,' he said. That's him, though. What else would I expect?

I guess those lost words came from that other part of him . . . the part that isn't so sure of world-domination. The part that shows through his eyes, those eyes that have aged faster than he has. Only twenty-two but wise . . . then again, maybe wise is not the word . . . experienced, cautious, hurt maybe. . . I never know. He never talks.

Well, almost never. It looks like everyone is leaving. The younger ones in the bunch have to get back

home without smelling too much like beer and cigarettes, leaving the rest of us to sit around until the creeping silence of the night pushes us toward home. I'll hate the long drive home tonight -- alone with myself after all the jokes and the conversation, the music -- the music. We're all a little like those guitar strings I suppose, side by side, sounding, resounding, but never actually touching. Being manipulated maybe, but never really understanding how the music is made, or even what it is. Isn't it funny -- creating, hearing, without knowing, understanding?

I guess it's all over now. The chords aren't quite right, so the guitars go back in their cases. A little too much beer on the part of the musicians, I believe. One is rambling his way toward the house, the toilet, and the couch, but he's still there, sitting alone on the tailgate, finishing the last of the Bud Light. It always comes down to this -- me and him, talking. Well, talking around in circles anyway. I wish it would be different tonight. I don't think I'll be back here for awhile . . . things at school are just too crazy. It seems so simple here. Maybe that's why he stays when everyone else our age is scrambling away.

-- Come 'ere.

-- What? I guess I should go sit with him . . . I'll have to go soon.

-- When are you goin' to move back home?

-- I don't know. Maybe when I'm done with school.

-- You need to move back home.

-- Why?

-- You just do.

-- Have you seen what's-her-name lately?

-- Hell no -- I don't want to either.

-- Oh . . . I thought you liked her. And so we sit and converse in words that don't really have any meaning. I don't know why we don't say what we should -- what we want to. Yet I sit here as the words drift off into nothingness and feel the warmth of his body, his arm around my waist and his lips pressed occasionally to the top of my head. Our feet dangle from the tailgate. . . he always wears those worn black boots -- boots good for manly, southern kinds of stuff -- boots to kick dirt in the world's face. There's an interesting image. . .

-- What are you laughin' at, woman?

-- Oh, nothing.

-- You better not be laughin' at me -- what is it?

-- Just thinkin' crazy thoughts, that's all.

-- About what?

-- About you, really, about who you are.

-- Well enlighten me. Who do you think I am?

-- I don't know -- you've fooled everyone else, I'm sure. I guess you could have fooled me too.

-- You know me better than anyone else around here.

-- Sometimes I wonder. . .

-- Let me tell you something about me. I like to think I

have the world in my pocket, and all those other people out here tonight, they believe me. But you -- you see through all my shit. When I'm honest with myself, I really don't have much of anything.

-- You'll always have me. *How trite-- of course he'll always have me. But we'll always be like this. Side by side, even touching, but not being able to find the right words. Like the missed chords after too much beer -- we're never quite in tune, so we finally quit trying and retreat to a comfortable distance. Then it's like an emotional hangover. Boy, aren't I waxing metaphorical tonight? I should write this down. It wouldn't matter, though . . . words just don't mean enough.*

-- Yeah, we'll always have each other, baby.

-- . . . *There's that old recognition in his eyes that I'm sure is reflected in my own, but as always, it's distant and fleeting, like a glimpse of the unattainable. I'm such a damn romantic, thinking of things like this. It doesn't matter anyway, at least, I can pretend that it doesn't and maybe he won't notice.*

-- It's probably time for you to go. You've got a long drive and it's late.

--I know. *How does it always happen like this? The*

*moment the words begin to make sense, the one time in a million that the truth starts to come out . . . it's all over and we plunge back into the realm of triteness. I might as well just get up and go home. Any more talk would be useless now. One too many wrong notes and all that's left is to go home and sleep it off.*

-- You have a safe trip home.

-- I'll try. *Like always, I'll walk to my car. He'll shut the tailgate and follow.*

-- Call me next time you're in town.

-- Sure. See you then. *My car engine starts reluctantly, the radio blinks on and breaks the silence. He bends for a hug, a kiss on the cheek.*

-- Bye.

-- Bye. *The radio is so loud and grating on long night drives like this. I would turn it off, but I need it to stay awake -- and to divert my attention from the reality of things. I wonder how much we really do take for granted? How much can we ever say, ever understand? It seems like we spend all of our time searching for the right note, and even if we stumble across it, the rhythm is off. Like always, I don't know. I think I'll turn the radio off anyway. . .*



## Contributor Biography

(in alphabetical order)

**Tracy Autry** is in CSU's Department of Language and Literature as a secretary while working part-time on her B.A. Business Administration. She is also minoring in the professional writing program. Interesting in writing poetry, short stories, and novels since a child, Tracy is preparing several books for publication.

**Dennise Brogdon** is a senior English major with an emphasis in professional writing.

**Tricia Foster** is an English major, with a passion for literature and the Spanish language.

**Joseph Francavilla** is an English professor at Columbus State University.

**Anita Dugat-Greene** has taught in the Department of Language and Literature at Columbus State University since 1997. Previous to living in Georgia, she lived in northern Minnesota, where she participated in poetry readings near the frozen lake of Lake Superior, with other souls seeking solace. She has taught at Lake Superior College, in Duluth, Minnesota, at Texas A&M University, and at Louisiana State University. Her poems have been published in regional magazines.

**Molly M. Henderson** will graduate in August with a BFA in Theatre Arts. In the fall, she will begin graduate studies in Arts Administration.

**John C. Jackson** is a Pre-Engineering student here at CSU. He plans on transferring to Georgia Tech, where he hopes to receive a degree in Computer Engineering. He loves to write poetry as well as music during his spare time. His instrument of choice: the electric guitar.

**John Kocian** is a senior English major, expecting to graduate in the spring of 2001. As editor of Arden for the last two years, he has a love of the written word as an artistic medium. He would like to thank Abbie Hoffman for his poetic inspiration.

**Leslie Maxwell** is a senior English major with a minor in Spanish. She plans to attend Auburn University for a master's degree in Spanish Language and Literature and then pursue a Ph.D. In her spare time, she enjoys reading and writing poetry, short fiction, and essays.

**John William Roach** is a sophomore at CSU. An English education major, he aspires to become a college professor of English. He attended Calvary Christian School from kindergarten through high school. He is an active member of the Baptist Student Union.

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